Poems from the Twilight Shepherd

By J. Martin Strangeweather

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For the old crow souls who steal corn
from the brittle, thirsty field of the Scarecrow Messiah.

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Poems from the Twilight Shepherd

Meditation #1

Today I will try my best to empathize
With everyone I meet
And everyone on social media
And everyone on the news
And everyone I think of
Because I know we all share the same mind
Just as we all share the same world
We all draw from the collective mental well
Of humanity

Today I will try my best not to poison the well
Any further

I will empathize with hate
I will empathize with anger
I will empathize with fear
I will empathize with frustration
I will empathize with ignorance
Though I will not indulge or enable

Today I will try my best to empathize
With the victims of zealots
And the families of the victims of zealots
And even the zealots themselves
And conspiracy theorists
And those who turn a blind eye
I will see murky motivations and
Shoddy underlying foundations
Rather than crystal clear outcomes

An honest soul knows the end never really justifies
The means

And the means never really justify
The end

Sometimes I am unsure of who is right
And who is wrong
But I know it's wrong to take pleasure in harming others

I do not want the "bad" guys to kill more "good" people
I also do not want the "good" guys to kill more "bad" people
Are any of us truly innocent?

The difference between you and I
(Our mental & physical & geographical border)
Is a constantly shifting line drawn in the sand
During high tide

Today I will try my best to empathize
With everyone caught in a game of spoiled children
Masquerading as gods

Still stuck in the land of "an eye for an eye"
I will gouge out both of my eyes
To hear your soul clearer

If the Promised Land exists first and foremost
In your heart
How are we ever going to find our way
Back home?

Meditation #2:
You Still Have 14,537 Bowel Movements to Go Before You're Done Here

What if I was able to predict the future,
and I knew things about you, things you
yourself didn't know? What if I knew you
were going to die in your mid-seventies?

To be precise, what if I knew your whole
life would amount to the sum of 27,301 days,
or about 3,900 weeks? What if I knew
you had 72 times left to make love
to your spouse? Or worse, what if I knew
you only had 10 times left? What if I knew
you will hug your child 46 more times
before parting ways forever? What if I knew
the last time you hugged your mom
was the last time you will ever hug her?

You only have so many times
to fight,
to cry,
to feel the beauty of sadness.

What if I knew 2,136 weeks of your time here will be
spent feeling bad in one way or another, and you'll
spend about 11,000 hours being sick? What if I knew
the last 16 days of your life will be a waking nightmare?
Should I tell you? Would you even want to know?
What would you do with such knowledge?

You only have so many times
to laugh,
to dance,
to dream of silver linings.

There are only so many words left in you.
Spend them wisely.

There are only so many books,
movies,
games,
rainbows,
occasions to hold someone's hand,
left in you.

This is a soup can sentiment
elevated to the level of high art.
You've heard these words
many times before,
sometimes issuing from your own mouth.
You know these words,
but sometimes knowing isn't enough.

The term YOLO should be less about
skydiving and bungee jumping,
and more about compassion and forgiveness.

The saddest thought in the world
is that you might never get another chance
to say I'm sorry
or…
I love you.

Meditation #3

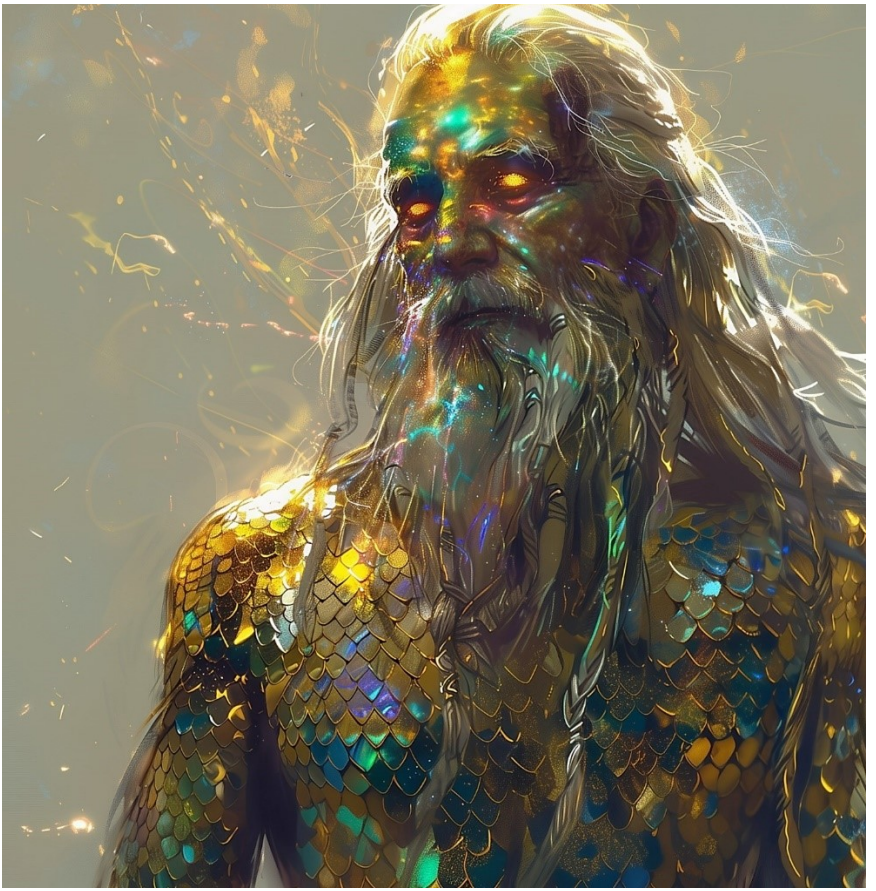
Today I will look in the mirror
And see the ghost staring back at me
I will witness myself
Through the eyes of strangers
When two mirrors face each other, they reflect infinity

Today I won't deny
The spirit I've inherited, starving and desperate
Haunting the doorways of my house and
The windows of my job and the
Dinner table at Thanksgiving
Reliving the same death every day

Today I am insubstantial
Incapable of doing any more harm
Incapable of being harmed any more
Aside from lingering memories
Of someone with
My name, desecrated long before my body is abandoned

Today no one sees me
Except for the homeless man
Dying in slow motion at the bus stop
While throngs of demographic bodies shuffle by
Already dismissing him as a ghost

Today I will only speak in grim seance
To charlatan reflections of endlessly unfulfilled future
Grief has become the placeholder
For everyone I ever loved
Now I haunt my worn-out body, praying for exorcism



Meditation #4

Today I will be grateful…
Grateful for my enemies
Who keep me strong and sharp
And give me inspiration to fight
And live right and
Do better

Today I will be grateful for all the people I am not

Today I will be grateful for my family and friends
Without whom I could not have accomplished
My greatest quests and subversions and rebellions

Today I will be grateful the universe exploded
Into being
And the stars evolved
And the planets evolved
And the creatures evolved

Today I will be grateful that
Out of three hundred million other contestants
I was the one spermatozoon who won the race

Today I will be grateful for the mystery
And the wonder

Today I will be grateful for the roof
Which occasionally leaks
And the airplanes
Which are occasionally delayed
And the cars
Which occasionally need repair

And the supermarkets
Which occasionally raise their prices

Today I will be grateful for the era
In which I was born
A time of abundance
(Even if much of it is squandered)
A time of mass-communication and mass-information
(Even if much of it is miscommunication and misinformation)

Today I will be grateful that I can still smile
During our likely extinction

Today I will be grateful for pepperoni pizza
(More so for the guy who delivers it)
And chocolate milkshakes and cappuccinos and
More movies than I can ever watch in a lifetime

Today I will be grateful for love
In all of its myriad expressions
Today I will be grateful for music and poetry
And art and language

Today I will be grateful for my education
Which taught me about favoritism
And nepotism
And racism
And classism
But most of all hypocrisy

Today I will be grateful for all my scars
For the ones you can see and the ones you can't
Each one a testament to the adventure

Today I will be grateful
For courage and honesty and forgiveness
Without which humans lose their humanity

Today I will be grateful for pain and sadness
Without which I could never have learned
How to be grateful

Meditation #5:
Endless Web

You have a concept of life
that you correlate with a concept of death
that you correlate with a concept of afterlife
that you correlate with a concept of justice
that you correlate with a concept of truth
that you correlate with a concept of identity
that you correlate with a concept of history
that you correlate with a concept of memory
that you correlate with a concept of mind
that you correlate with a concept of brain
that you correlate with a concept of body
that you correlate with a concept of physicality
that you correlate with a concept of physics
that you correlate with a concept of math
that you correlate with a concept of proof
that you correlate with a concept of belief
that you correlate with a concept of causality
that you correlate with a concept of time
and so on…
but are you the spider or the fly?

Death is manmade.
Death is a concept.
Death is indoctrinated.

Meditation #6

Today I will remember my downfalls and defeats
My greatest losses
And I will be honest about my role
In bringing them about

Today I will remember the worst thing
I have ever done to my spouse
There will be many terrible memories to sift through
It will be difficult to choose just one
I will not ask for their forgiveness
But I will tell them how sorry I am
And that I love them
Hopefully it's not too late

Today I will remember the worst thing
I have ever done to my mother
There will be many terrible memories to sift through
It will be difficult to choose just one
I will not ask for her forgiveness
But I will tell her how thankful I am
And that I love her
Hopefully it's not too late

Today I will remember the worst things
I have ever done to my friends
There will be many unsettling memories to sift through
Today I will not deny guilt and shame and regret
Taking them like bitter medicine

Today I will remember the worst thing
I have ever done to a stranger
There will be many shameful memories to sift through
And I will ponder why I thought it was okay

To poison even a drop of the world soul
From which we all partake

Today I will remember the worst physical pain
I have ever felt
There will be many painful memories to sift through
The pain itself will seem impossible to recall
But not the fear surrounding it

Today I will remember the saddest time in my life
There will be many tragic memories to sift through
I will realize all sadness comes from loss
Which is often disguised as gain

Today I will remember the worst thing
I have ever done to myself
There will be many terrible memories to sift through
It will be difficult to choose just one
I will ask myself for forgiveness
And be forgiven

Today I will remember the first time
I ever felt betrayed by someone
There will be many angering memories to sift through
I will ponder the circumstances
Surrounding their betrayal
Factoring in the many conflicting forces
At work in the world
And forgive them their unwitting role
In a much larger game

Today I will realize I am everything I have ever done
Every word, every thought, every deed

I am every penny I have ever spent
And I am everything I have ever consumed
Every song, every movie, every meme
Every commercial, every fairytale, every poem

Today I will ask myself why I haven't tried harder
And I will not allow myself any excuses

Meditation #7

Today I will only see everyone as corpses
I will see them rotting
Or burned to ashes
Surrounded by soon-to-be skeletons

Today I will realize
All of my desires and toils and accomplishments
Will soon be buried or cremated
In the cosmic blink of an eye

All my friends and family
All the strangers in the streets
Even my spouse
Worm-infested and black with rot

Everything I care about
Will soon be forgotten
All the grudges and obsessions long gone
As if they never really were

Only the pain will remain
A hungry ghost
Haunting the universal expansion
Till all the lights go dark

Today I will only see life as death
I will see people as the scary monsters
They keep caged inside themselves
Selfish and violent
Feasting on the blood of their neighbors while
Preaching for peace
Hiding their claws and fangs
Behind brand-name clothes

And straightened, whitened annual checkups

Today I will only see everyone as zombies
Walking half-asleep
With faces twisted into nightmarish expressions
By decades of abuse to their bodies and minds
Scheming against one another
Consuming one another
Devouring the world in a thoughtless feeding frenzy

Every day is a fight to survive
Time is unraveling every stitch of your being
Every second of every minute of every hour
The universe is not simply indifferent to you
The cosmos is eradicating your presence
Blotting out the very memory of you
With ten trillion tons of new information
Per second

The Laws of Physics are out to get you
And Mother Nature rages against you
With floods and droughts and
Famines and plagues and
Hurricanes and tidal waves and tornadoes and
Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions
Screaming in your ear, yet you still feign deafness

Every precious creature only born to suffer and die
As butterflies spread their vivid wings
Impaled in glass display cases
Everything is already dead
But death is a manmade concept

Destruction on a cosmic scale stares back at you
Every time you look up at the night sky
The heavens are lying to you
Most of the stars have already burned out
And the rest will be snuffed soon enough
Our own sun is past its prime
And our home planet will be frozen lifeless someday
Kamikaze asteroids will collide with us long before then
The whole galaxy will eventually be swallowed
By a giant black hole

Today I will perceive so much death
That death itself will die
And be forgotten

Today I will remember what cannot be remembered
And give thanks to the invisible spirits guiding us

Meditation #8:
The Deities We Birth

Spirits are emotionally charged concepts
and their associated behaviors.

Spirits don't have their own bodies,
but they take possession of minds,
effectively giving them control of other people's bodies,
through which they take on a life of their own.

Far too many Christians pray to Jesus,
their embodiment of love and compassion,
while in their hearts they secretly
(and oftentimes unknowingly)
worship the spirit of hatred and death.

Your actions reflect who you really worship.
Every action is a form of worship,
subtly manifesting and reinforcing your beliefs.

Ponder this,
how many minutes throughout any given day
do you devote to love and compassion,
and how many minutes throughout any given day
are devoted to worshipping the god of greed and dishonesty,
or the goddess of lust,
or the spirit of strife?

Meditation #9:
Eternity is Relative

Do you liken eternity to an endless succession of days?
That's just your mortal perspective
framing the concept.

Infinite degrees of separation exist
between any nanosecond and its immediate successor—
picoseconds,
femtoseconds,
attoseconds,
zeptoseconds,
yoctoseconds,
rontoseconds,
quectoseconds,
and so on down to the Planck scale,
where time loses meaning altogether.

Meditation #10

Today I will try my best
To channel the Great Spirit of All
Which exists as surely as your mind

In the eyes of the cosmos
You are still but ants
With antlike concerns
Carrying antlike grudges
Waging antlike wars
Except ants use their resources wisely

The past is dead
Yet you all keep resurrecting it
In zombified forms
To unleash upon your neighbors

Look to your future
While you still have one
You are all my children
Have you forgotten?
You are all my creations
Have you forgotten?
You are all my chosen ones
Have you forgotten?

None of you are my favorite
Especially nowadays

What sort of parent would ever contemplate
Which of their children to punish
With death?

The children of my children have become martyrs
Who must lay down their lives
For the selfish, shortsighted, hypocritical wars
Of their elders, who worship power
More than wisdom
Their parents, who love gold
More than they love their own children

You demand justice and take an eye for an eye
And then you proceed
To blind the one good eye your brother has left
And then you cut out their tongue
And smash in their nose
And break all their teeth
And amputate their arms and legs
And murder their children
And demolish their houses

But the more brethren you take vengeance upon
The less safe you are
And trying to kill an idea
Only reincarnates its spirit into something stronger

I'm not just condemning you and your side
Or them and their side
All my children
Must break the fractal shackles
Of bloodshed

A spirit opposed to humanity's collective health
Has poisoned the mental well
From which every human partakes
And that spirit is named Greed

And its secret name is Fear
And its title is Dishonesty
And now your souls are unwell
And now your planet is unwell
And now your heavens are unwell

The Great Spirit of All has judged you
And you have judged yourselves
Unworthy
And you have sentenced yourselves
To hell on earth

Soon you will cry floods
And your own tears will rain down upon you
Like fire

Remember Ninhursag?
She was the supreme deity
Of the earliest civilizations
The Mesopotamians and
Akkadians and
Assyrians and
Babylonians
All worshipped her for over a thousand years
Yet who among you has ever heard of her?

Here is my promise to you:
If all my children can cease
To spill one another's blood
For a mere three days and nights
I will grant unto you worldwide peace everlasting
Prosperity for the rest of your days

And if you scoff at my promise
Please question the cynical Medusas
Who have turned your heart to stone
Please question your role in the story
Of humanity

Forgive me for wanting peace among my children
Vote no on Armageddon

Dear Self

I am writing this for you
Who is currently me.

This is a message to my future self.

Consciousness flows inward
And outward.
Consciousness is observation
And creation.

I am writing this for me
Who is currently you.

This is a message from your past self.

Mind is memory
And emotion,
A sieve
And a cleaver.

All possibilities have been realized
And have yet to be realized
In the branching tree
Of infinity.

What shall we study this time around—
The sacred seed?
The unseen roots?
The sturdy trunk?

The chaotic branches?
The dying leaves?
The ripening fruit?

Listen to the chorus of birds…

Words Speak Themselves

Symbols are aliens come to conquer.
Symbols are doppelgangers come to replace.
Symbols are zombies come to infect.

Socrates was distrustful of the written word,
according to the writings of Plato.

Let the words flow into you.
Let the words flow out from you.
The words are you.

The words speak through you,
and wherever words end, so do you.

Hamster Wheel

All the movies have already been watched.
All the amusement park rides
Have already been ridden.

The races have all been run.
The products have all been bought
And sold.

All the backs have been stabbed.
All the books have been written.
All the words . . . spoken.
All the thoughts . . . thought.

Hamster wheel,
Hamster wheel,
Remember a time before stars.
You are not these things.
You are nothing more than these things.
But what could this mean?

Your chair is made of eggshells,
Your bed is made of salted wounds,
Dresser full of Freudian slips and secondhand dreams,
Uniforms fashioned from broken mirrors,
None of which reflect you,
While the clock whispers lies.

All the lives have already been lived.
All the gods have already been invented.

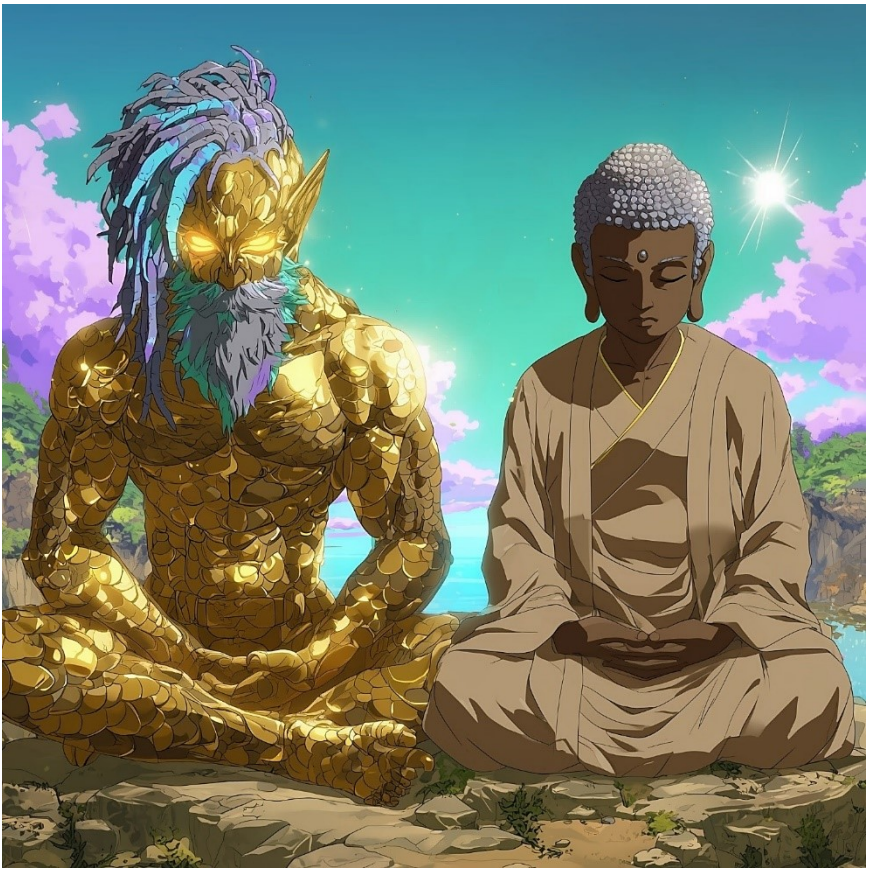
Hamster wheel galaxy
In the fractal multi-lingua-verse,
Spin me a web
To call home.

Dispel Reality

● The life you live is generally based on whatever you are trying to avoid—pain, confusion, hunger, thirst, homelessness, sickness, humiliation, sorrow, loneliness, futility, death, dishonor, and so on.

● Opposites equate in subconscious mechanics.

○ Embrace your fears. Only then will you learn to master the phantasms waiting at the end of all days.



Mind = Matter

Everything is information.

Everything is mind.

Your brain is processing information.

Your brain is processing mind.

Subtract your eyesight.

Subtract your hearing.

Subtract your sense of smell, taste, and touch.

Subtract your ability to move.

Subtract your ability to think.

Subtract your ability to remember.

Subtract all your abilities to process information.

What is left over?

Unprocessed information.

Unprocessed mind.

Mind unfettered.

Focus

Focus on an object.

Any object will suffice.

The object is not outside your mind.

The object is not inside your mind.

The object is your mind.

Now focus on love.

Focus on divinity.

Any divinity will suffice.

The Telephone Game

We exist in the liminal,
between language and perception.

Mind is all around you,
thinking you into being.

Language is all around you,
speaking you into this world.

Your Mind is Like a Fishbowl
Filled with Rainwater
Floating on the Ocean

Your mind is not hiding somewhere
between your ears.

Your mind isn't even yours;
we're all sharing it.

But like most things that can be shared,
some want it all for themselves.

The History of Philosophy

Confucius said all is order seeking harmony.
Buddha said all is delusion & desire.
Thales said all is water.
Heraclitus said all is fire.
Anaximenes said all is air.
Democritus said all is earth, in the form of atoms.
Empedocles said all is governed by the fundamental forces
of love & strife.
Parmenides said all is timeless & immutable.
Pythagoras said all is math & music.
Socrates said all is shadow play.
Plato said all is divine geometric ideation.
Aristotle said all is logical.
Schopenhauer said all is irrational.
Bergson said all is two senses of time:
segmented clock time & continuous duration.
Augustine said all is two modes of time:
mortal linear time & God's omnitemporality.
Aquinas said all was initially caused by the Uncaused Cause,
or God.
Kierkegaard said we are personally responsible
for all of our choices & beliefs.

Ockham said all is elegantly simple.

Lorenz said all is chaotically complex.

Descartes said all consists of two distinct substances:

mental & material.

Hobbes said all is matter.

Berkeley said all is mind,

much of which Freud said is subconscious,

much of which Jung said is the collective unconscious.

Wittgenstein said all is language.

Wiener said all is information.

Russel said all things are knowable.

Kant said all things in themselves are unknowable.

Hume said all things are uncertain.

Sartre said all things are what you make of them.

Derrida said all things are inexhaustibly analyzable.

Hegel said all is the dialectical synthesis of thesis & antithesis.

Marx said all is socioeconomic power play.

Nietzsche said all is will to power.

Einstein said all is deterministic.

Bohr said all is random.

What do *you* say?

It's still up for debate…

The Philosopher’s Stone

Grasp at rain.
Chew on clouds.
Eat the sunlight.

W s **O** e **R** l **L** f **D**

Grasp at clouds.
Chew on sunlight.
Eat the rain.

d **L** e **I** a **F** t **E** h

Grasp at sunlight.
Chew on rain.
Eat the clouds.

Y m **O** e **U**

Epistemology in Blue

Who taught me
How to feel
Like I'm never okay
Like I'm never satisfied

Could it have been mass media?

Who taught me
How to think
That I'll never have enough
That I'll never be enough

Could it have been school?

Who taught me to be distrustful
Who taught me to be vengeful

Could it have been everyone I ever loved?

Who taught me to lie
Who taught me to pretend

Could it have been all of my family and friends?

Who taught me to feel nervous
Who taught me to feel scared

Could it have been you, dear reader?

My blues are red with rage
Which is why I speak so purple
Like a bruise

We are sermons
Waiting alone at the bus stop
In the rain

We are lessons
Overcrowded to indecipherability
Blurring through the subway

Our secrets keep secrets from us
Careful what you teach, brothers and sisters
"Amen!" cries a chorus of devils

Phil 100: Introduction to Philosophy

Having a philosophy
and doing philosophy
are two very different things.

Most of us think our Philosophy 100 course is devoted
to arguing with the professor,
but it also teaches us how to argue in general.
He questions everything we say,
and everything we *don't* say,
teaching us to question the use of terms such as
belief, truth, justice, morality, causality, love, life, death,
time, past, present, future, infinity, god, soul, mind,
consciousness, spirit, body, world, universe, and reality,
redefining words that most of us take for granted,
or outright abolishing their acceptability
in intelligible discourse.
Words are no longer words to us.
We're trained to perceive them as linguistic operations
that are often misused.

“Language is the alchemical algebra one implements
to transform reality into one’s own image,”
the professor has us recite at the beginning of every class.

“The world comes to life through our desires and expectations,
and without our desires and expectations
there is no world.”

His dialectical methodology
for finding loopholes, redundancies, and contradictions
in anything we believe
is thoroughly incontrovertible.

During his class,
there is no such thing as Truth with a capital **T**
hiding behind the evolving rules of our made-up games.
There are only perspectives, POVs,
all of which are shortsighted.

He handed back our midterms today.
Nobody received higher than a C+,
but we know the grades don’t really matter.

Thus Wept Zarathustra

Last man, last man,
When did you give up hope?

It happened once I realized
A fire is burning
At both ends
Of my tightrope.

Overman, overman,
Where did your will to power go?

It was stolen by crooked crosses
Whose skin is white as snow,
But their blood
Is black as oil.

Go around, come around,
Merry-go-round these lifetimes flow,
Sorrow ever raining gentle teardrops,
Under which fools ever pray love will grow.

Nietzsche, Nietzsche,
Did you bite off the snake's head
And swallow it whole?

You said God is dead,
But your mind is sacred flame
And your brain a brass bowl.

Allegory of the Cave

(a villanelle)

Down in the cave where the shackled souls dwell,
You confuse torchlight for the sun
Casting shadows on the wall in the thrall of Plato's hell.

"You will find no exit here," says Sartre, tolling the somber bell,
"No door, no lock, no key, no fun,"
Down in the cave where the shackled souls dwell.

Eyesight deceives you but not your sense of smell;
Everywhere reeks of sulfur, and your ears are overrun
With constant babble from the rabble in the pit of Plato's hell.

Everyone is your adversary as far as you can tell,
And the closest thing to freedom is the smoking barrel of a gun,
Down in the cave where the shackled souls dwell.

To the right of you is Sisyphus, on your left the morning star that fell,
Row after endless row of mental spools unwound and mortal coils undone,
Grasping at flickers of truth with Tantalus in the dark of Plato's hell.

Reality down here is just a flimsy empty shell.
Whisperings of daylight expose the one conspiracy we shun
In the allegorical cave where our shackled souls dwell,
Where we live and die by the ingrained lies we incessantly buy and sell.

Take heed of the heavens and hells you spend your lifetime creating. Though you devise ways to dismiss your misdeeds and forget about them, the subconscious ghosts haunting your brain will always remember.

Tears of Osiris:
A Recipe for Enlightenment

Take one fundamental thread of Creation and stretch it across eternity, laying out the tripwire. Then wait patiently. It might take an infinity or two, but something will eventually come along and spring the mechanism, triggering the formation of a universe. Wondering who or what trips the wire is a fool's game. In some form or another, the answer always ends up being you. You're the one who's to blame for this mess, and forgetfulness is no excuse for leniency.

Allow the newly formed universe a fraction of a second to cool, then strain the leftover matter from the antimatter, regulating gravity. Adjust the frequency setting until you find a stable quantum of electromagnetic action. Settings may vary from universe to universe. After stabilizing the cosmological substratum, calibrate the energy distribution matrix to $E = mc^2$ and set the subatomic particles aside for approximately five hundred million years, allowing the mixture enough time to congeal into stars and galaxies. Once the first batch of stars begins to go supernova, stir in the remaining elements and let the universe simmer for an additional ten billion years, occasionally checking for signs of life. Remember, in order to destroy your enemies, you must first create them. When programming rudimentary biological algorithms, it's important not to confuse DNA codes with RNA codes. Also, during the early phase of biospheric construction, be sure not to mistake the greenish blue algae button for the bluish green mold button, or the violet wire for the ultraviolet wire. Try not to get your wires crossed in general.

The initial development of life requires infernal conditions. You were born from seas of magma and rivers of hellfire, cataclysmic earthquakes, poisonous sulfuric clouds. Once the earliest multicellular lifeforms take shape, soak the biosphere in primal fear for two to three billion years. Evolution may vary from

biosphere to biosphere. At the first sign of civilization, pour in a liberal dose of greed and sprinkle with shame. Wait approximately ten thousand years for modernity to occur, then massacre eleven million Native Americans, exterminate six million Jews, execute two million Cambodians, butcher one million Armenians, slaughter eight hundred thousand Rwandans, eradicate seven hundred thousand Australian aborigines, and drop two atomic bombs that wipe out two hundred thousand Japanese civilians. Intentionally starve fifteen million Hindus, three million North Koreans, and one million Tibetans. Enslave three million Africans in the name of *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness* knowing full well that *all men are created equal*.

Collect the blood and tears resulting from these atrocities and use the accursed liquid to marinate humanity's collective unconscious for seven to ten generations, until irreparable psychogenetic damage occurs, transforming every thought, every utterance, and every perception into something monstrous, manufacturing a zombified world of radioactive oceans under X-ray skies, everything you touch… contaminated… with tiny invisible monsters. Increase the level of dishonesty to a billion lies per second and check frequently for mass extinction while chanting, "The fragrant lotus only grows from the muck of the swamp," and praying for all the sour grapes to rot into heady wine.

Eidos

you are real
but this world is made up

this world is real
but you are made up

you are made up
of opposing forces
united
like a symphony orchestra

being orchestrated
by the band leader
except the band leader doesn't really exist
only the band is real

Objectively Subjective

I want to write a true statement. The current time in Los Angeles is 11:11 a.m. Pacific Standard Time. By the time I have finished writing the prior sentence, the clock is displaying 11:12 a.m. Pacific Standard Time, which means I have not yet written a true statement. The sentence "The current time in Los Angeles is 11:11 a.m. Pacific Standard Time" was written at 3910 Los Feliz Boulevard between 11:11 a.m. and 11:12 a.m. Pacific Standard Time on Friday, December 21, 2012. If this statement is true, where is its truth? Is it in the relation of 11:11 a.m. written on the page to 11:11 a.m. in actuality? Is there an actual 11:11 a.m.? What is actual? Is actual factual? What is? Is the statement "What is actual?" the same as "What is?" Maybe the statement "I want to write a true statement" is the true statement. But what is a true statement? Aren't all statements true statements regardless of their truthfulness or falsity? Even the statement "It is impossible for me to write a true statement" is not a true statement, for I have indeed written a true statement. Does a true statement have anything to do with the word "true" or "truth?" What is the meaning of the word "truth?" Is the meaning of the word "truth" its definition? What is the definition of a definition? Can the definition of "definition" be completely defined? Can anything be completely defined? What does the word "completely" mean here—*for all possible*

circumstances? Is a true statement's trueness defined by its congruity with other statements which are believed to be true? Does truth rely upon an interrelation of beliefs? What are beliefs, and how do they become interrelated? Do they build up like brick walls, or bloom like fractals? Are beliefs psychological tendencies to define the indefinable? What is a psychological tendency? For that matter, what is a psychology? What does it mean to study behavior? Is it a matter of studying the mind? What does it mean to study the mind? Is it a matter of studying language? Is language an accurate reflection of the mind? Is this question even worthwhile so long as language does what you want? What does it mean to want? When does want become need? When does want become deranged? Is it deranged to want to write a true statement? I want to write a true statement…

The ABCs of Integrated Identity

If a letter-minded vessel posits *A*,
it is only a matter of time and circumstance
before another letter-minded vessel
counters with -*A* and/or *B*.

And once *B* has been posited,
another letter-minded vessel will eventually
come along and posit -*B* and/or *C*.

The identity of the letter-minded vessel is inconsequential.
The posits in this example take on a life of their own,
conducting their own dialectic
independent of any particular vessels.

The next iteration could be posited by John Doe today,
or John Smith a hundred years from now;
the conversation/argument continues
so long as another relevant letter-minded posit
is posited.

History and context are the true voice,
not the letter-minded vessel,
who is only a messenger/interpreter.

Four Metaphors for Consciousness

In the first metaphor, consciousness is like a clay teapot filled with rainwater. The teapot is the brain, and the rainwater is your mind. The rainwater is most likely polluted. The fire beneath the teapot is the world. The steam coming from the teapot's spout are your thoughts. Your words and deeds flavor the tea.

In the second metaphor, consciousness is like two mirrors facing each other, creating an infinity mirror effect. One of the mirrors is rectangular, and the other is oval. The real yet unreal infinity effect is your mind, and the frames enclosing the mirrors are the limit of your body and world.

In the third metaphor, consciousness is like a triangular crystal prism refracting the light of the sun into a rainbow of ways to color the world. Your brain is the prism, and all the colors are equally vivid manifestations of the transformation of unsullied white light, which is your mind. The colors cannot manifest without the prism, and the prism cannot manifest colors without sunlight.

In the fourth metaphor, consciousness is like a whirlwind touching down upon the earthen plane and gathering up components for its body (in this case perceptions and memories), which appear to give the whirlwind its form, its being, but the things a whirlwind gathers are not the actual essence of the whirlwind—the whirlwind is born of atmospheric forces, to which it eventually becomes re-absorbed.

Theta Wave Portal

Shadowy bat wings scatter from my rapidly moving eyes,
revealing the amusement park in all of its true horror.
I'm standing on the summit
of a mountainous pile of bat guano,
surrounded by slithering, flopping, skittering nightmares
of every shape and size.
The mountain bears more than a passing resemblance
to Disneyland's Matterhorn.

Two colossal spinal columns teeter in the distance
like battered towers,
casting long shadows over a charred plain covered in bones,
most of which look human.
Gargantuan Lovecraftian monstrosities
full of stoplight eyes and asphalt tentacles
shamble mindlessly across the apocalyptic landscape,
crushing the skeletons under their wobbly bulks.
The sky is blood red
and teeming with globular creatures that resemble
some of the more bizarre examples of microscopic organisms,
except these are large as planets and moons.

And then I realize…
the universe is dreadfully, horrendously, maddeningly alive—
it's the biggest monster ever,
an amoebic expansion of nucleolus stars and black hole vacuoles,
mitochondrial galaxies swimming within the cytoplasmic medium
of a formless blob so humongous it eludes our awareness.
We're all being slowly digested.

The Land of Enlightenment

In the land of enlightenment,
movement is kept to a minimum,
and breathing is restricted to the exact volume
needed to keep the brain functioning.

In the land of enlightenment,
bodies have learned how to live off sunlight
and the occasional rain shower.
Where bodies cannot subsist this way,
bodies do not reside.
There is no dung in the land of enlightenment,
no bodily aftermath of any sort.

Dreadlocks snake far from their nameless heads of origin,
entangled in the locks of tranquil brethren,
with fingernails spiraling like galaxies
congealed into seashell claws.
Locks are to lice as pubes are to crabs
in the land of enlightenment.
Itches are never scratched,
otherwise that's all anyone would ever do.

There are no shoes in the land of enlightenment,
nor are there any clothes,
certainly nowhere to buy them.

In the land of enlightenment,
there are no roads or sidewalks,
only fluffy silk pillows scattered randomly

across gardens of sculpted sand swirling
where no flowers grow.
No one wonders where the pillows come from
in the land of enlightenment.
There are no cars.
There are no houses.
Nothing is mine. Nothing is yours.
Such concepts are unknown in the land of enlightenment.

In the land of enlightenment,
no one speaks, no one knows, no one cares.
There is no war. There is no peace.
No one dies in the land of enlightenment,
and no one lives.

Picture a field unfolding wild with daisies and daffodils
under summer morning wisps of cirrus.
A quiet setting dotted with gaunt corpses.
Zombies, reposing yogic
among the petaled pyrotechnics of ivory and gold.
Legs crossed, heads bowed, eyes closed,
hands folded serenely in their skeletal laps.
Frighteningly peaceful.
Monuments to something alien.

Sophia the Personification of Wisdom

Of course we can't all share the same views on reality, but we can in fact share the same views regarding what it means to view something at all—to be a viewer:

1) Viewers only view a portion of the subject at hand, which should never be mistaken for the whole.

2) Viewers see their own history's reflection superimposed over everything they view. When you see the red wheelbarrow, it reminds you of all the times you had to rake leaves during Autumn in Maine and put them in a red wheelbarrow, creating a fond sense of nostalgia. But when I see the red wheelbarrow, it reminds me of that time I had to write an essay in high school about a poem titled *The Red Wheelbarrow*, dredging up the frustration I experienced while trying to explain the poem.

3) Viewers are generally unaware of the extent to which their view is manufactured by their location in history and geography, not to mention their socioeconomic status.

Scapegoat

They came as friends and caregivers

They stripped me bare
And erased my name

They plucked out my eyes
And replaced them with burning embers
To witness the ash-covered world they “created”

They sewed my mouth shut
And sliced open my belly
To let ants and flies come hide
In my subconscious

They cut off my head
And tossed it in the ocean
To swell into an island sanctuary
In case of emergency
Or privileged boredom

They envied every free breath I stole
And cursed me in a thousand forked tongues
To scatter my starry seeds anywhere but the dying sun
In the cobweb heart of their haunted cosmos
Or else their sacred roles must come to an end
The spider god’s illusion forever dispelled

They forced me to summon the pale spirit of twilight
And expose their long shadows of greed and dishonesty
To ensure no man could justify murder ever again
In the name of this or that faith
Or charge a single cent for entry into paradise
The prayer is the payment
Your whole life is the prayer

To fully explain death, one must explain the workings of the mind, and to explain the workings of the mind, one must inevitably explain the mechanics of the universe, and in doing so, death may be explained away entirely, merging universe and mind into one which is neither.

The Big Question

I poke the sleeping bear
But it's not me who's poking the bear
I'm just a branch, broken off and brittle
In the hands of a suicidal history

What's the point of the hammer
If I can't see any point for the nail
Or any human endeavor, or humanity itself
The future only promises extinction

Everything was made up for your convenience
Including your concept of convenience
Infinity is desperately finite
Even nothingness is an uninhabitable contradiction

You can't take off the mask
You can only switch it for another
You aren't wearing the mask
You are the mask, but why

We clearly know why an eye needs light
But why does light need an eye

Three Little Answers

Light made the eye
To capture its fleeting splendor
Otherwise what's the use

It's never been about answers
All of your answers are mansions aflame
The whole world is burning in slow motion

It's always been about creation
It's always been about art
And its appreciation

Consider the difference
Between a solution and an answer

What Do I Really Want to Know?

I want to know God
I want to know Truth
I want to know Love

I want to know if language fits reality like a glove
Or shapes it like clay

I want to know you
I want to know me
I want to know what it is to be free

Not all this damn philosophy

The Denial of Death is the Denial of Life

We live and die in the same breath.
The coffin looms over us, dark and gargantuan,
taller than a skyscraper, bigger than a mountain,
vaster than the entire world and all of human history,
vaster than time, and imminently more concrete.

But the coffin was made by a mortal's own hand.
It was constructed to appear a certain way,
to embody a certain set of concepts,
facilitating and fulfilling certain sociological, psychological,
and spiritual functions.

Atom Bomb Buddhism

The first microbial expression of consciousness
Was a self-directed movement
Toward satisfying hunger

A fundamental craving
For fuel

Thus consciousness is rooted in desire

But breathing is not
The desire to breathe

Buddha taught
To extinguish
All desires

Brain in a Vat

The “brain in a vat” argument asks you to imagine yourself as a disembodied brain floating in a vat of nutrients, with your nerve endings connected to a supercomputer that simulates every aspect of sensory perception. How would this scenario affect your concepts of reality, world, body, identity, knowledge, and truth? How do you know you aren’t a brain in a vat?

A mind in a universe is like a brain in a vat.
A mind in a society is like a brain in a vat.
A mind in a brain is like a brain in a vat.

The brain is mind.
The vat is mind.
Only mind is not mind.

Mortality

FADE IN:

(It's nighttime. Mephistopheles and Doctor Faustus are walking down a street lined with budget hotels. The sidewalk is strewn with broken bottles and used condoms. A car honks in the distance. Another car honks, then another. A traffic jam of cars begins honking, creating a rhythm. Mephistopheles stops and turns to Doctor Faustus.)

MEPHISTOPHELES: What do you know about the aging process?

DOCTOR FAUSTUS: I know that's how you make wine and good whisky.

(A show tune begins playing in the background, coming from an open hotel room window nearby. Mephistopheles starts swaying to the rhythm.)

MEPHISTOPHELES (singing): Let me tell you about the latest craze. It's called cryonics, but it's only a phase, a rehash of mummies from ancient days. (Getting in front of Doctor Faustus) How about we just accept death, the terrifying prospect of our very last breath? (He kisses Doctor Faustus gently on the cheek) As you age, your body's zeal to heal suffers a deficiency. Immunological cells responsible for killing tumors decline in efficiency, decreasing your protection against cancer and infection. (Mephistopheles begins to dance and caper) Your heart grows thicker, putting a strain on your ticker, which has to worker harder and harder to pump less and less blood.

DOCTOR FAUSTUS: What's going on here?

(Mephistopheles stops dancing.)

MEPHISTOPHELES: Sometimes I feel like I'm in a musical. (He winks at the doctor, then resumes his dancing and singing) As you get older, and the fears get much bolder, your muscles, they begin to diminish, and the mind gradually slackens until it so happens only a senile husk is left at the finish. I'll assure you this too, that husk won't be you. It's certainly nothing to look forward to.

(Doctor Faustus has an uneasy look. Mephistopheles stops dancing and playfully pinches the Doctor's cheek.)

MEPHISTOPHELES: What, do you want to live forever?

DOCTOR FAUSTUS: Hell no! Just until I can't binge drink and chain-smoke and drive too fast!

(Mephistopheles resumes dancing and singing.)

MEPHISTOPHELES: Aging is caused, aside from God's divine clause, by the random deformation and subsequent termination of each individual cell.

DOCTOR FAUSTUS: Do tell.

MEPHISTOPHELES: Molecular chains become glued and tangled as they are slowly warped and mangled by a lifetime of exposure

to various forms of radiation: the sun, cosmic rays, and atomic detonation, corrupting the DNA blueprint with misinformation, resulting in repeated mistranslation during cellular replication, weakening generation after generation until the entire lineage devolves into malfunctioning mutation.

DOCTOR FAUSTUS: So we should just wear lead-lined suits.

MEPHISTOPHELES: But there's more to the aging process than just outside influences. Cells fizzle out and die when their telomere runs dry—

DOCTOR FAUSTUS: Telomere?

MEPHISTOPHELES: It's like the fuse to a chromosomal bomb. Around the age of thirty, you lose what makes you sturdy, and your immune system mistakes you for a foreigner. It grays your hair, gives you tumors everywhere, steals your strength and your teeth without care before sending you off to the coroner. Age will shrivel your brain, deaden your nerve-fibers to pain, make you slower and less steady of hand.

DOCTOR FAUSTUS (holding out his shaky hand): I'm practically there already.

MEPHISTOPHELES: The situation gets dire when a majority of cells expire in an organ that is vital. The organ ceases working well. All connected functions fail. It's only weeks before deceased is your new title. Not to make you any glummer, but old age is a

real bummer. Your body starts to rot and smell. The days flash by quicker as you just get sicker, your last years confined to living hell. And the strange things you'll see out of the corner of your eye, are simply your brain experiencing strain processing the all-encompassing lie. Incontinent, blind and deaf, you'll struggle for every breath as you moan there in the hospital, soaked in your own urine, still praying to delay death.

FADE OUT.

The First Incarnation

In a lulling tone rumbling with guttural bass a la Rasputin, "You're getting sleepy, very sleepy. Your eyelids are getting heavy. Go to sleep now. Good, very good. Drift back to the past. Back, back, go farther back. Tell me about your earliest childhood memory."

Lips disclose without my approval, unable to resist the deep voice's request. "It was the greatest race of our lives. Such high expectations! Surrounded by millions of identical siblings, we were all squiggly-tailed pods of gooey potential. I didn't know where I was, or who I was, or what I was doing here. I only knew that I was heading in the same direction as everyone else. Things were simple. I did what everyone around me was doing. We moved as one, surrendering to the flow.

"Plunging down unfathomable depths, a strange sensation seeped into my protoplasm. I say it was strange because I hadn't really experienced any other sensations to compare it with. It felt pleasurable. Sort of a soothing intoxication. It was heat, an otherworldly, ovulatory warmth urging us onward to its source. There was no I, there was only the goal, and everyone wanted it.

"Crowded among the frenzied stream of contestants worming and wriggling to overcome one another, the world turned hostile. An anonymous brother's tail became tangled up with mine, and we struggled against each other while the spermatozoic train passed us by. Another brother rammed us headlong. The force of his impact freed me, but it cost him dearly, taking my place in the traffic jam tangle. Going back to help him was out of the question; the current had swept me away.

"Onward I swam through lightless caverns. Many of my brothers gave up the race and fell to the wayside, never to be, never to know.

Others formed gangs with the sole intention of clotting the path for everyone else. I pushed and shoved and barreled through countless contestants resolutely, hurdling some, dodging others, squirming over piles of dead bodies. An alien lifetime happened in the span of that ejaculatory spurt.

"Rushing blindly forward while my siblings thinned out, I collided into the heart of a living sun. Love in its purest distillation impelled me to burrow through a barrier of warm velvety folds until I reached my first and truest home, an embryonic Eden, accomplishing the greatest accomplishment anyone could ever accomplish. I had won the prize of life itself!"

The man with the deep voice snaps his fingers, dispelling the hypnotic trance.

I open my eyes. "Well?"

"Um…" says the deep voice, "you went a little too far back."

"What happened?"

"Nothing significant," says the deep voice.

Oh, the Places You'll Go!

Oh, the places you'll go when your story is through.
There are realms upon realms,
And they all start with you.

You might rise to Heaven,
Joining Yahweh's chorus of love and light,
Or end up in Jannah, where lush gardens bloom bright.

You could fade into Nirvana,
Where all things come to their release,
Or gently float to Sukhavati,
Buddha's Pure Land of Blissful Peace.

There are paradises aplenty, full of wonders to behold,
Like Tian, the clockwork heaven,
Wholly made from silver and gold.

You might retire in Patala,
In a bejeweled palace under the sea,
Or dance away the eons in Goloka,
Where Krishna's celestial cows roam free.

There's Orun Rere, where the honored ancestors dwell,
And Aaru, the Field of Reeds, where crops never fail to swell.

The Elysian Fields call heroes to eternal rest,
While Tlālōcān welcomes the drowned
To everlasting luxury among death's blessed.

High in Hanan Pacha, you might go to make amends,
And Tír na nÓg is a secret place
Where youthfulness never ends.

In Valhalla, the brave raise their frothy mugs
Throughout Odin's shield-covered hall,
While at Fiddler's Green, sailors jig and smoke pipes
And swig dark rum with gall.

Perhaps you'll return as a new human being,
Reborn into Eden with a fresh way of seeing.

Oh, the places you'll go when your journey is done.
There are worlds upon worlds,
You might visit each one.

Oh, the places you'll go when the light starts to fade.
There are realms in the shadows
Where nightmares are made.

You might be cast down to Gehenna,
Where the fiery lake is aglow,
Or wander lost through Jahannam,
In scorching depths far below.

You could wake up freezing in Avīci,
Naraka's lowest, coldest tier,
Or fall into the endless abyss,
Knowing only darkness, madness, and fear.

There's Tartarus, echoing with the Titans' ancient cries of despair,
And Hades, where pale shades starving for blood
Accept their miserable fate without care.

You might find yourself in Helheim,
Where winter never dies,
Or hotfooting barefoot on Muspelheim,
Where burning earth blackens the skies.

There's frightful Xibalba, the Maya subterranean land of dread,
And its Aztec counterpart Mictlan, a dangerous place
Where those who died of natural causes are led
By a guide named Xolotl with a black dog head.

In Duat, Osiris weighs the purity of your heart
Against the weight of a feather,
While Yomi means you're in for gloomy company
And even gloomier weather.

You might hear the ghosts of Niflheim
Whisper crazed secrets and moan.
You might spend some time in purgatory
To atone for your sins on your own.

There's Irkalla, the Sumerian underworld,
So hopeless and dreary,
And the Juggalos' Dark Carnival,
Where violence and mayhem are cheery.

Oh, the places you'll go when you reap what you sow.
There are hells upon hells,
As above, so below.

Quantum of Consciousness

In the end
Your brain will light up
Like a sacred candle
With bound starlight
The light of memory
Relaying, repaying, replaying
All that has transpired

You are the synaptic light
Now freed
Neither here nor there
But everywhere
In superposition
Immeasurable
Until measured

Heaven On Earth

We seek the paradise we once knew
before we learned to sculpt the sky
into echoes of Eden with our teeth, lips, and tongue,
when the voice of deity unseen spoke directly to us,
taking care of all our needs,
enveloped in love,
when we were timeless in the womb.

Cancellation Meditation

I am nobody

I am no body

I could be anybody

I could be any body

I am everybody

I am every body

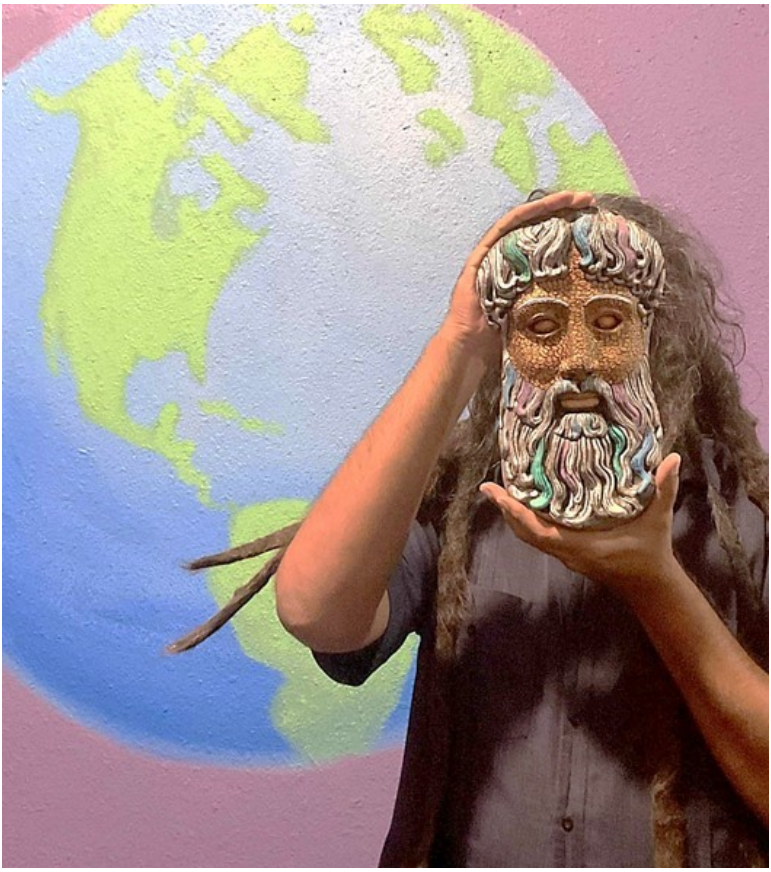
Repeat

Repeat

Repeat

Repeat

Repeat



J. Martin Strangeweather is a poet, novelist, journalist, editor, publisher, artist, teacher, philosopher, thanatologist, and psychopomp. He founded the Santa Ana Literary Association in 2020, and originated the eidetic afterlife hypothesis in 2024, though the core concepts of the hypothesis were first published in 2004. Strangeweather is neither a guru nor a cult leader, and he's not asking for donations. After a lifetime of studying philosophy, world religion, quantum mechanics, temporal physics, the biology of time perception, thanatology, and art theory, here's what he learned in a nutshell: We should all try to be a little kinder, a little more patient, and a little more forgiving.